

NORTHROP'S Ladies Specialty Shop—often referred to as the Gulf Coast Fashion Center—was 86 years old September.

Having grown from its original squat, most windowless frame store built out over the beach at Pass Christian in 1876 its present two entrance, two story building at the corner of Fourteenth Street and Twenty-Fourth Avenue in downtown Gulfport, Northrop's today proudly points to over 7,000 customer large accounts in 32 states, including Alaska and Hawaii and the District of Columbia. Accounts have been carried with residents in such far away places as Venezuela, Canada, France, Germany, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Peru, British Honduras, Spain and Japan.

This number, of course, does not include the many loyal patrons who prefer to pay cash for their purchases.

General Manager Mrs. J. S. Perusse wraps up the store's present progress, policy and popularity in one succinct sentence: "At Northrop's the distaff side of the family can outfit herself from lingerie to handbag and her home from bed linen to English Bone China table settings."



Confederate Cavalry Captain Abner Reubin Knight Northrop who founded 86 years ago at Pass Christian the country store that developed into today's Northrop's smart ladies shop of Gulfport.

THIS again was an absolute necessity move. The first bridge across Bay St. Louis was being built. No longer did the cumbersome, time wasting ferry discourage business and tourist traffic from the New Orleans and Louisiana area. Gulfport was now not only the center of Harrison County government but it was fast becoming the commercial center of the entire Coast strip between the two bays of Biloxi and Bay St. Louis. Its Great Southern Hotel was one of the finest in the Deep South and the Markham Hotel had just been built.

Until 1935 Northrop's of Gulfport continued to operate and prosper as a department store, but in that year the store was completely remodeled and the policy changed to that of a fashionable ladies apparel and specialty shop. In 1944, while World War II was still being fought, this growing business was sold by Elmer Northrop to Mr. and Mrs. Joseph S. Perusse. The name Northrop's, with its 68 years of prestige, was retained.

Seven years later, in 1951, Northrop's was again remodeled to accommodate its increasing business . . . and in 1956 when the store celebrated its 80th an-

Northrop's of Gulfport

By Ray M. Thompson

The Oldest Retail Store in Continuous Operation On the Mississippi Gulf Coast

The store's founder, Abner Reubin Knight Northrop, was 24 years old and studying to be a dentist when the War between the States broke out. His father having been a graduate of West Point, there was a flair and a fondness for the military in Abner's makeup. Promptly he organized a regiment of Confederate cavalry, became its Captain, and served throughout the war, mostly west of the Mississippi River.

When the South surrendered Captain Northrop returned to his profession of dentistry, practiced awhile in Biloxi, married a Biloxi girl, began raising a family of eight children and in 1872 moved to Pass Christian where he combined pulling teeth with local politics.

Four years later Abner Northrop discontinued his dental practice altogether and opened up a general mercantile store to serve the farmers and wool growers of the nearby counties. So successful was this venture that branches were established in Purvis and Poplarville. These were later sold to other owners.

When Abner died in 1896 he left the Pass Christian store in the capable hands of his sons, George and Elmer Northrop. This second generation opened another store in 1899 in Gulfport, the year that brand new Coast town was incorporated. They showed excellent foresight because Gulfport was already the Coast crossroad of the east and west L&N Railroad and the north and south newly completed Gulf and Ship Island Railroad, today the Illinois Central. This upstart Gulfport was shortly to become the seat of Harrison County, stealing that distinction from Mississippi City which had held it for over half a cen-

tury. Gulfport was also to become in a few short years, with its newly constructed harbor, the greatest lumber shipping port in the United States.

For approximately a quarter of a century the Northrop brothers operated both the Pass Christian and Gulfport stores. An interesting footnote at this point is that in 1916, the year before the United States entered World War I, Northrop's abandoned the old fashioned horse drawn delivery system and adopted trucks.

In 1922 the Gulfport Northrop's moved into the newly constructed building at its present location. Two years later Elmer Northrop became the General Manager and in 1925 the Pass Christian operation was consolidated with that of Gulfport into one store.

niversary, Mrs. Perusse became actively identified with the store as General Manager.

Today's constantly increasing surge of visitors from all parts of the country are not only impressed with the imposing array and variety of nationally known trademarks of women's apparel and accessories carried by Northrop's, but are also pleased with the soft sell that is the store's policy—a combination of Southern hospitality, Coast charm and the pleasant personalities of the experienced clerks themselves, most of whom are veteran employees.

Of the 30 Northrop's employees seven have been with the store over 20 years. Four others have been employed for longer than ten years. Three are high

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Northrop's modern store located at 14th St. and 24th Ave., Gulfport, Mississippi.

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Northrop's

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Mrs. Perusse, owner and general manager, keeps in frequent and friendly personal touch with the store's customers.

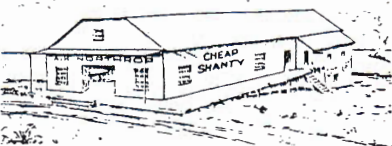
school and college students who are part time employees learning merchandising on an apprenticeship basis.

One of Northrop's most popular community services is its Annual Fashion Show held every year on the Thursday following Labor Day. Its own customers are its models. This is an event eagerly awaited and attended by the women of the Coast from teenagers to grandmothers.

Another attraction the store offers is its artistically decorated window display changed 52 times a year. Each week-end new merchandise is displayed to attract attention to the store's new styles.

To keep up to the split second in new merchandise and styles the store's three buyers attend the buyers markets regularly in New York and Los Angeles for ready-to-wear and accessories, and in St. Louis and Chicago for shoes. In addition the store retains the services of resident buying offices in New York and Los Angeles.

Northrop's Store history from a country store to a smart metropolitan ladies specialty shop reflects almost step by step the tremendous progress the Mississippi Gulf Coast has made in the last 86 years—from a remote almost island area cut off from the rest of the country by two big unbridged bays to its



The original Northrop's store of rough lumber pictured here straddled the beach at Pass Christian in 1876. Notice the complete absence of sidewalks and hard surface road and the cypress cistern, the only means in those days of procuring drinking water, and notice the "Cheap Shanty"—probably the Bargain Basement of that period.



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NORTHROP XX

Shirley Achee Northrop, 89, of Pascagoula, Miss., died May 22, 2001, in Pascagoula. She was born May 13, 1912 in New Orleans, La. Mrs. Northrop was a long time resident of Pascagoula and member of Sacred Heart Catholic Church and attended Our Lady of Victories Catholic Church in Pascagoula. She was preceded in death by her husband, Dan C. Northrop; her parents, A. J. and Laura

Achee; and two brothers, Lloyd and Bobby Achee.

Survivors include two sons, Dan Northrop, Pascagoula, John Northrop, Vancleave; two daughters, Gayle Meisner, Raytown, Mo.; Ellen Cole, Pascagoula; three sisters, Ann Neski, Harwinton, Conn., Laura Oehrle, Gonzales, La., Theresa Gatlin, Long Beach; four brothers, Earl Achee, Gonzales, La., C. J. Achee, Bridgton, N.J., Norris Achee, Gulfport, and Jack Achee, Torrington, Conn.; 11 grandchildren; and 13 great grandchildren.

A funeral Mass will be celebrated on Friday, May 25, at 10 a.m. at Our Lady of Victories Catholic Church in Pascagoula, where friends may call one hour prior to service.

Interment will be in Machpelah Cemetery, Pascagoula. In lieu of flowers, the family prefers donations to: The

Saltillo Mission, Parroqui del Perpetuo Socorro, Abasco, Coahuila, Mexico.

Any questions concerning the Saltillo Mission please contact Our Lady of Victories Catholic Church or Sacred Heart Catholic Church.

Arrangements by O'Bryant-O'Keefe Funeral Home, Pascagoula, Miss.